

EYD Plan Focus Group: Supporting Parent and Community Engagement
(presented with DC PIRC, MCS, and Ward 8 Education Council)
July 27, 2010
Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School

Objectives:

- *The focus group will be able to articulate what a successful environment for increasing and improving parent/community engagement around education and positive youth development should look like*
- *The focus group will look at best practices from around the country to discuss potential recommendations for increasing engagement at the school level*

Agenda:

I. Opening/Review Agenda	6:00 – 6:15
Welcome from DC PIRC/MCS/Ward 8 Education Council (Robert Byrd)	
II. Brief overview of EYD Plan and updates	6:15 – 6:20
III. Review best practices around parent/community engagement	6:20 – 6:45
IV. Guiding Questions (see below)	6:45 – 7:45
V. Closing/Next Steps	7:45 – 7:50
a. Follow-up and additional meetings	
b. Contact information:	
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Guiding Questions

NOTES:

Before we were able to jump into the agenda, a question was raised about the definition of “parent and community engagement” and the group spent some time discussing what we thought could be an overarching statement or clear vision of “family engagement”.

What Is Parental Engagement? Defining:

- Varies across communities and Wards, type of school, and age of child
- **Shared ownership or Shared responsibility**
- Participation does NOT always equal engagement
- Need to shift to speak about FAMILIES, not just PARENTS
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- “Parental Engagement happens outside of school and within. It is collaborative between school and family, serves as a guide to the family through education and partnering in school. It is shared leadership to improve schools and to raise student achievement and leadership.
- Schools (DCPS and charters) must provide resources and the support for parents and families to be engaged
 - o Clear expectations that are communicated well in advance and repeatedly (what do parents need to do to be engaged? What do schools want them to do?)
- Families should have ownership of how they want to be involved and in which areas they would like additional supports

- It needs to start at 0 – prenatal – information about supporting the education and development of a child from day one
- Engagement versus involvement:
 - o They are often used interchangeably
 - o Engagement is usually deeper, more meaningful; while involvement is more superficial
 - o (quantitative versus qualitative – involved = attending X meetings, engaged = two-way communication and input)
- **What does engagement look like?**
 - o Family showing interest in child's day at school
 - o Checking homework
 - o Communicating back and forth (from teacher to parent and vice versa)
 - o Setting expectations
 - o Supporting teacher's work and teacher supporting family/parent role = make students understand that their learning day never "ends" and that family members are also teachers
 - o Communication is not only directly with child but also with family
 - o Parents need to also be proactive in looking for signs that there is a problem
 - o Opportunities to assist families in identifying strengths and weaknesses
 - o Visibility of family in child's education (whether at school or not)
 - o Reaching out to build trust and break barriers at every level
 - o Holding them accountable for engagement in their child's education
 - Holding report cards until they come in to get them

What Do Families Want/How Should We Engage Them?

- Develop a Title I Plan
- Provide opportunities for them to input on programming
- Give them a decision-making role
- Input in the policy process
- They should not just be participants attending meetings but meaningfully contributing
- Families want to be **EMPOWERED** to be a part of their child's education
- Families want clearly defined expectations
 - o A "Parent Compact"
 - o Define "regular involvement" and give examples and suggested ways to be engaged (variety of opportunities)
- Partnership = more than just saying "We do XX at this school and you do XX at home, and the two should be separate"
 - o The lines are gray and we need more sharing – parents support classroom teaching at home and teachers support families during the school day
- Schools/teachers need to **LISTEN** to what parents are saying
- Show parents that there is a reason to be involved and that it is WORTH THEIR TIME
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Identifying Barriers to Engagement:

- Families don't feel respected by school leaders and teachers at times and this can lead to distrust.
- Not understanding how they can support (what meetings are "important", what activities are vital to be "engaged")
- Teachers/ leaders assuming parents don't want to be engaged
- Lack of trust
- Time is expensive

- No active PTA
- Politics of schools
- Difficulties navigating resources and system
- Some parents with criminal backgrounds can't be involved directly within the school
- Transportation
- Multiple "asks" of parents that are not always meaningful
- Disconnected "knowledge" base (teachers not connected to CBOs and vice versa)
- Parent resource centers not resourced with meaningful materials
- Poor communication
- Opportunities to participate in person or attend meetings limit engagement because of inflexible hours
 - o Childcare
 - o Timing (food is helpful to bring families in, but it's often more about the timing of meetings in the evening when families would otherwise be having dinner that is often a barrier)
 - o Not enough notice is given
 - o Sometimes meetings are a waste of time (start late, agenda not clear, not always relevant for all families)
- School leaders and teachers aren't welcoming or receptive
 - o Need to provide support and training for not only teachers but office staff and others who might interact with visitors to the school

1. What is working well currently/what services or structures already facilitate parent and community engagement in local schools and around positive youth development?

- CYITC Parent Center's
- Common Language around positive youth development
- Meeting with families during enrollment (should expand this – all about relationships)

2. How do you typically learn about support services/opportunities to engage? How would you like to get information about programs/services?

- Email, word of mouth, automated systems, hand-outs, flyers, phone tree, parents contacting other parents, social media
- WANT: All forms of communication (text message, Facebook, online calendars, power source, centralized location for easily accessible information)
- Keep in mind ALL parent groups when communicating (grandparents, young moms, single mothers or fathers, etc)

Recommendations

1. What are the areas for improvement that you would like to see addressed further or efforts that don't currently meet your needs? (identify as many as possible and prioritize – which are immediate priorities, 6 months, 1year?)
 - Mapping out what supports/programs exist to support parents and families as well as programming around positive youth development (academic supports, athletics, etc)
 - Expand parent resource centers
 - A task force to look at this
 - Communication audit and plan
 - o How are we doing this currently and do we have a strategic vision for how the District communicates with families about resources for families?

- Fully established parent centers run by parent, with this person acting as the parent liaison...able to provide insight and support about specific schools
- “Parents as Partners” program – supports and trainings that provide background knowledge and guidance
- More concerted efforts to involve male role models/figures in the children’s lives
- Organized communication strategy
- Develop common language around family engagement
- Better physical space
- Identify each parent group; tailor strategies for each group to ensure that it assists parents with addressing/overcoming barriers to being engaged
- School leaders/teachers need to be trained in parent engagement (including office staff and security)
 - o School and family trainings that are targeted for particular demographics (men, re-entering citizens, etc)
 - o Trainings in “soft skills”
- Visit best models across the nation
- All school staff should take AYD training with the Trust
- A broad campaign that raises awareness District-wide for how to support children and youth’s education and development (make people want to talk about this)
- Parent resource guide (like those that existed in previous years)
- TRANSPARENCY
- Connect to existing ways in which information is communicated to families/where they are a captive audience (TANF?)
 - o Go to them!
 - o Clinics, grocery stores, generate word-of-mouth, faith based organizations
- Look at other jurisdictions that have trained ministers in primary prevention
- Bring in what connects with families (food, musicians, other community activities)
- Identify what we mean by “information” that parents want/need
 - o Should have input from families themselves about what they need
 - o Include:
 - Out-of-school time opportunities (weekends, summers, academic, sports, etc)
 - Ward Specific Information
 - Social Services
 - Mental health/behavioral support
 - Tutoring
 - Daycare
 - Info from across all agencies in ONE centralized, easy to access place
- Coordinators in schools or by cluster (parent coordinator)
 - o This person can be beyond DCPS – needs to know about resources both in the school and in broader community
- A clearinghouse of information (providers can promote their resources and parents can locate services)
 - o But how do we VET what goes into this? Need some sort of process/guidelines
- Dedicated development of a calendar of what is going on across the schools and city around education and youth development
- Engagement opportunities in places other than school
- Also need to ensure engagement is across the board (other District agencies)Non-profit/District partnerships need to be stronger (building off information/strengths of each)
 - o General lack of disrespect and suspicion needs to be addressed
- Assessment and better/more equitable distribution of services
- Develop ways to motivate/compel parents to be engaged